



Special Edition

Letter From The Assistant Commissioner

Over the past four years, one major focus of the Department of Education has been and continues to be "Closing the Achievement Gap." Because of your willingness and hard work, we have seen children with disabilities in this state included more than ever in the general curriculum since the genesis of the federal law. Scientifically-based instruction, one of the many challenges of the reauthorized IDEA, has contributed to the rise of test scores of children with disabilities. Are we where we want to be? Absolutely not! But, we are going to continue our course until we see even more improvement.

IDEA '04 brought other changes to the forefront as well. One piece of the legislation that is a major challenge is disproportionality. What is disproportionality? It is the inappropriate over-identification of students of race or ethnicity as students with disabilities. When Congress was reauthorizing IDEA they recognized the fact that children of a particular ethnic group were being removed from the general curriculum more than others and

that something needed to be done about it. These students typically experience a more limited education and lower expectations; and this in turn resulted in lower/negative outcomes for this population of students. To resolve this problem, Congress amended IDEA '04 to require each state collect and examine data with regard to racial and ethnic disproportionate representation in four (4) areas: (1) Identification of students in specific disabilities categories; (2) Placement of students in particular special education settings; (3) Incidence, duration and type of disciplinary action, including suspension and expulsion; and (4) Overrepresentation of students in special education.

As you are aware, each state must review each LEA's data to determine if they have a "significant disproportionality" problem. Once this is determined, the state has the responsibility to provide technical assistance and if the problem persists, the LEA is required to expend fifteen-percent of their IDEA funds on early intervening services. These funds must be used to analyze the nature of

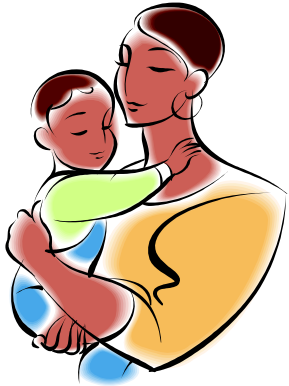


Joseph Fisher
Asst. Commissioner

the disproportionality problem and design a plan of improvement. Students will then receive instruction designed to meet their unique needs prior to consideration for placement in special education. This approach will ensure that students are not identified due to the lack of appropriate instruction in reading and math. Further, this approach will only identify those students who are truly in need of special education services.

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The deadline for submission of comments is March 23, 2007.

Notice of Public Hearings

Proposed Rules for State Administration of special education Programs

The Tn Dept. of Education, Division of Special Education will hold public hearings for the purpose of receiving comments from interested persons regarding the Department's proposed rules for state administration of special education programs pursuant to the Department's proposed policies for systems of payment requirements in the administration of early intervention programs, pursuant to Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), 20 U.S.C. 1400, et seq. and the Department's proposed policies for systems of payment requirements in the administration of early intervention programs pursuant to Part C of IDEA.

The meeting sites are accessible to individuals with disabilities and sign language interpreters

will be available. If you need auxiliary aid or services other than a sign language interpreter you must contact the Department at 615/741-0660 at least two weeks before the scheduled meeting date. Although we will attempt to meet a request we receive after this date, we may not be able to make available the requested auxiliary aid or service because of insufficient time to arrange it.

The proposed IDEA Part B Proposed Rules and Part C Proposed Policies are available on the internet by accessing the state [website](#). Click the "News and Announcements" link.

The dates and times for the public hearings are as follows:

February 20, 2007

Memphis City Schools
Board of Education
2597 Avery
Memphis, TN 38112
4:30pm to 6:00pm
7:00pm to 8:30pm

February 26, 2007

Pellissippi State College
Goins Administration Bldg.
10915 Hardin Valley Road
Knoxville, TN 37933
4:30pm to 6:00pm
7:00pm to 8:30pm

March 1, 2007

Airport Marriott
Nashville Ballroom
600 Marriott Drive
Nashville, TN 37214
4:30pm to 6:00pm

Address all comments about these proposed regulations and policies to Joseph Fisher, Assistant Commissioner, Division of Special Education, 7th Floor, Andrew Johnson Tower, 710 James Robertson Pkwy, Nashville, TN 37243. If you prefer to send your comments through email you may address them to us at the following address: Education.Comments@state.tn.us. You must include IDEA Part B or IDEA Part C in the subject line of your electronic message. Please submit your comments only one time, in order to ensure that we do not receive duplicate copies. The deadline for submission of comments is March 23, 2007.

News From the Middle TN Regional Resource Center

The MTRRC had its 4th Annual Middle TN SPED Supervisor's Conference at Fall Creek Falls State Park on October 5-6, 2006. It was well attended by 70 school system participants. This was more than any other conference thus far.

The theme of this year's conference was "Twist and Shout: Rock and Roll through the Decades." The MTRRC staff and the steering committee made up of SPED Supervisors did a "super" job in planning and facilitating the conference, as evidenced by the evaluations.

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There have also been several staff changes at the MTRRC since September 2006. Lisa Ventura joined our staff on September 1. She is the management consultant for the North Central region. She came to us via Marshall County where she was a lead special education teacher. Kay Flow-ers also joined our staff in January as the preschool coordinator of the Middle TN area. Kay transferred from the WTRRC where she served in the same

capacity. Finally, Devin McClain joined the MTRRC staff on February 1st. Devin is a compliance consultant for Middle TN. Devin previously worked for the Institute of Learning Research (ILR) in Nashville.

MTRRC staff are very busy as we continue to assist parents, students and LEAs in providing programs and services to special needs students. Two major areas of technical assistance are Closing the Achievement Gap and Disproportionality.

2006-2007 TCAP-Alt PA News

The deadline has arrived and as you might imagine, some testing coordinators have been burning the midnight oil this last week collecting, compiling and double checking the portfolios for required components, bubbling in the student demographic sheets, filling out reports of irregularity, packing shipping boxes and sending the portfolio boxes off to our contractor—Measurement Incorporated (MI). Their hard work is almost done and our scoring Contractor, MI, is ready to begin.

Last year was our first year to contract out the actual scoring of portfolios. This was a dramatic change from previous years where each school system was responsible for scoring their own portfolios while maintaining a minimum of 80% scoring reliability. We at the state in turn had to conduct a statewide scoring utilizing 20%

of the portfolios randomly sampled statewide to check on overall scoring reliability. This process was all encompassing and demanded vast amounts of work spread across all LEAs, state and individual teachers. This process lent itself to possible errors and flaws in the scoring methodology because of the numerous hands involved. This is why we are so pleased to have contracted with MI. They have a 95% scoring reliability rate and have helped to streamline the scoring process while allowing the portfolio to morph into a more accurate and valid method to assess student abilities.

The amount of different individuals working with the data has decreased dramatically due to MI exclusively entering student demographic information in a data base and receiving the portfolios directly from the school systems. We feel this

will ensure student data accuracy and account for all the portfolios' location. MI in turn will train the scoring trainers and readers at the same location where the portfolios are housed. After the scoring is complete, all portfolios will not be sent back to the school systems as in the past, but archived in a secure facility for one year. This will enable MI access to the portfolios if revisiting is needed.

These are exciting times for us and we anxiously await this year's portfolio scoring and results. The portfolio is a work in progress, and we continually strive to develop the best assessment for our students with severe to profound disabilities.

If you have any questions, comments or concerns regarding TCAP-Alt portfolios or scoring, please contact Terry Wallis, Special Education Assessment Coordinator at Terry.Wallis@state.tn.us.



*Terry Wallis,
TCAP-ALT Coordinator*

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2006-2007 Gifted Program News



*Ann Sanders
Director, Gifted Services*

As a result of House Joint Resolution 75 (HJR 75) a Joint Study Committee was formed to examine and make recommendations for changes in the State Board of Education Rules and Regulations for Intellectually Gifted students. An Intellectually Gifted Task Force was assembled to make revisions and clarifications to the Gifted Criteria as recommended by the Joint Study Committee. The

Gifted Task Force has met numerous times in order to accomplish this mission. Proposed revisions to our Gifted Standards passed a first reading with the State Board of Education. A second reading is scheduled in late April. After approval is received, work will begin on updating the Intellectually Gifted Manual and creating a training CD to be sent to all Special Education Supervi-

sors and Gifted Coordinators. Our goal for implementation of the revised standards will be the 2007-2008 school year.

The Response to Intervention Initiative in TN

Dr. Kathy Strunk



Kathy Strunk
SIG Director

The Division of Special Education continues to move forward with its Response to Intervention initiative. A study group plans to meet during March to develop further guidance and policy specifically aimed to help districts with RTI.

The TN Dept. of Education highly recommends use of the RTI online modules developed by the TN State Improvement Grant and the IRIS Center for Faculty Enhancement, Peabody College, Vanderbilt University:

[Http://
iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/
onlinemodules.html](http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/onlinemodules.html)

The modules are receiving national praise as a resource for

professional development because of their excellent translation of research to practice in a very user-friendly format. The free, interactive modules allow districts to structure professional development to meet their individual needs.

Several districts across the state are beginning to implement components of RTI. Some key points were emphasized by participants at a recent statewide training event that included both general and special education: "RTI processes include many things our district has been doing for years;" "Our principal has been critical to the success of high quality reading

instruction and the tiered model approach;" and "It has taken our schools several years to achieve the improved reading scores and reduced special education referrals we are seeing now but we are so glad to see all teachers serving all students!"

If your district is beginning to work on the RTI approach, please send a quick notification email to

Kathy.Strunk@state.tn.us.

Also, please continue to check all divisions of the Dept. of Education website for future professional development opportunities on reading instruction.

For more information on RTI please visit the Division of Special Education website: <http://state.tn.us/education/speced/seannounce.shtml> which offer some resources:

"RTI School Readiness for Implementation"

"Suggestions for RTI Professional Development"

"Memo from Joseph Fisher on RTI (September 2006)"

TN State Improvement Grant (SIG)

Dr. Kathy Strunk

TN SIG partners continue to be very busy working on literacy at all school levels and at the same time are thinking ahead to future activities. One of the common phrases heard in relation to grant activity is "scaling up" and SIG partners are working with Assistant Commissioner Joseph Fisher to build infrastructures that will further disseminate and sustain best practices in literacy, professional development and family involvement. Currently, these activities focus primarily on *collaboration* with all divisions of the Dept., higher education and other grant initiatives. Ensuring that these structures are developed and nurtured is critical for the success of our students.

Alissa Ongie, ETSU partner and SIG Preschool Consultant, provides statewide preschool professional development and family workshops on literacy-rich environments and home-school connections. She has recently organized and enlisted the help of other grant members in a year-long experimental design

study of the impact of SIG preschool services.

The SIG's focus on grades K-3 includes a recent 2-day SIG/IRIS Center statewide Training of the Trainer event for school districts, higher education and state education consultants in both general and special education. The training revolved around how to gain knowledge and implement Response to Intervention processes through use of four [online modules](#) with particular emphasis on "Reading Instruction" and "How to Put Together an RTI Approach." Trainers included IRIS Center partners Naomi Tyler, Zina Yzquierdo, Janice Brown and Kim Skow and Special Education partners Kathy Strunk and Donna Parker. A highlight of the training was the keynote address by Teaching and Learning Assistant Commissioner Susan Bunch. Susie highlighted the niche RTI fills for TN educators to come together

around the table as we work toward improved student outcomes. The SIG will partner with IRIS in the development of two additional RTI modules, one to help administrators with RTI and one that describes how Tier 3 might be implemented in an RTI model.

Kandy Smith and Gail Cook, UTK partners and SIG Ed. Consultants, emphasize work with teachers in 4th grade through high school, providing professional development on best practices in literacy. Please visit our [SIG website](#) to view their TN Academic Vocabulary Project. Kandy and Gail also provide training on such topics as literature circles, book clubs, text sets, writing instruction, reading centers, word walls, progress monitoring and differentiated instruction. Plans are underway to begin development of LEA videos of teachers providing best practices in these areas.

TN State Improvement Grant (SIG) Continued...

SIG's UTK partnership also coordinates collaboration with Higher Education Reading and Special Education faculty through an online information listserv and existing TN higher education conferences. Currently underway is a study of "Ten TN Successful Elem. Schools" that proposes to bring together LEA faculty around several variables that include, but are not limited to, test scores. A resulting report would provide valuable information and training ideas for other TN schools.

Family involvement is an emphasis provided for all levels of children by SIG partners UTK Center for Literacy Studies, S.T.E.P and Family Voices.

SIG's family literacy toolkit and its accompanying presentation have been recently updated and enhanced with more information about special needs students, reading instruction, books and other resources. The toolkit presentation is increasingly requested by schools and families in districts all over the state, so grant partners have been joining forces with multiple districts and multiple funding sources to bring families and schools together around the subj. of their children's literacy. [The toolkit notebook is also available online here.](#)

Other recent family involvement activities include S.T.E.P.'s highly-attended Focus on Minorities Family Con-

ference, co-sponsored by the SIG. The conference provided support (lodging, meals, day-care, parent training, reference materials) particularly to families that have children with disabilities and English language learners. Family Voices partners are currently initiating a SIG Family Involvement Guidebook that targets both educators and families in TN. The latest [SIG newsletter, Winter, 2007](#), features a response to an increasingly reported family/school LEA issue, "student bullying."

Please email Margaret.Donald@state.tn.us for more information about how the TN State Improvement Grant may help your district.

Professional Development Staff Development Initiatives

Special Education development in TN is evolving. More and more staff development is specifically designed to contribute toward achieving the goals of *Closing the Achievement Gap: All Students, Our Students* or meeting the very specific standards of the Tennessee Special Education State Performance Plan. Because both of these documents hinge off of data gathered from local school districts, alignment with the needs of school system and individual schools has been addressed. Recently, there has also been a concerted effort to engage in more collaborative activity with general education. By sharing resources and information, greater gains can be achieved for all students.

Major Staff Development Initiatives Include:

- **RTI: Responsiveness to Intervention**
- **Secondary Transition**
- **School-Wide Positive Behavior Programs**
- **Ongoing expansion of TRIAD Training and training on the subject of Autism Spectrum Disorders**
- **A variety of staff development offerings on inclusive programs, differentiated instruction, use of assistive technology**
- **Early Childhood Outcomes**
- **Collaborative Preschool Programs**

Best practices will be showcased at the *Annual Special Education Conference, February 28—March 2, 2007 at the Nashville Airport Marriott.*

For more information regarding Staff Development Initiatives, please email Donna.Parker@state.tn.us.



Donna Parker

Professional Development Coordinator



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DIVISION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

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Tennessee's Early Intervention System Recognizes The Harwood Center

for 50 years of dedicated service to
children with developmental delays and their families.

Tennessee's Division of Special Education also honors
Harwood Center's commitment in raising community awareness
to the importance of early intervention.

And a special acknowledgement for her leadership on behalf
of Tennessee's children with special needs to

Margaret Headrick

Executive Director

Presented on February 8, 2007 by:

Joseph F. Fisher, Assistant Commissioner, Division of Special Education and
Jamie T. Kilpatrick, Director Early Childhood Programs, Division of Special Education